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RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

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VOL.5 NO. 12
SECOND ISSUE OF
JUNE 1975
~~#110~~ #110

How Readers Rate the Trains

ON THE COVER

Our first reader train-rating survey issue is heralded by this unusual new art work done for a current Amtrak newspaper ad. Looking more like a diving bell than a locomotive, this is an artist's conception of the end of a French-built Turboliner.

AMTRAK TO SELECT OWN EXPERIMENTAL ROUTES

Amtrak and the DOT announced on June 20 that all future experimental rail passenger service routes will be selected by the Amtrak Board of Directors.

Prior to the passage of the Amtrak Improvement Act of 1975, the Secretary of Transportation was required to designate at least one new experimental line annually, which would be operated as part of the Amtrak system for a 2-year period. Under the new law, Amtrak's Board of Directors will be responsible for designating experimental service. Amtrak will select a new route by July 1, 1976.

Priority consideration must be given to experimental routes which would extend rail passenger service to the major population area of any state in which no large population is now served as part of the basic Amtrak system. To date, 3 experimental routes have been selected by the DOT: Boston-Chicago, Norfolk-Cincinnati, and Washington DC-Denver. Of these 3, only the Norfolk-Cincinnati service has actually been placed in operation.

All applications for new service previously received by the DOT will be transferred to Amtrak, eliminating the need for resubmissions. Inquiries and future applications should be addressed to: W. Scott Armentrout, Ass't to the President, Amtrak, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W., Washington DC 20024.

LETTERS

I'd like an opportunity for rejoinder on my recent proposals for reviving the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR. RTN reader Matthews from Toronto (LETTERS, last issue) is fairly close to hitting the issue squarely when he suggests that many Midwestern U.S. cities do not have the necessary structure or "ingredients" to support large amounts of short-haul intercity rail service at this time.

During the period of decline in the 1950s and 1960s, the Midwest intercity rail services were hardest hit. During the same period, however, the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR reported steady or increasing loads until 1968, the year CZ came under "the cloud." Until that time, CZ average occupancy, even in off-season was rarely less than 80%.

In addition to being an attraction in itself, CZ goes where traveling people like to go: Colorado the year around; California, which means cable cars, redwoods, Yosemite, movie stars, glitter and romance. For instance, the new ski resort at Vail, Colorado opened only a few years ago, had recorded 550,000 visitors by Mid-March, 1975, for the season that opened in October, 1974! Visitations are also high and increasing at Aspen, a 45-minute drive from the Rio Grande at Glenwood Springs. Were a thru CZ to stop at Dotsero, Colorado, many passengers would use thru rail service from both east and west, and would have, again, a 45-minute ride from CZ train service to the Vail resort community.

America's transportation technocrats have greatly enjoyed their role as high priests and arbiters of transport fashion. When unable in the 1960s to kill off passenger trains entirely to suit their "modern" and fickle tastes, they since have continuously attempted to persuade Americans that future rail passenger service must be concentrated in short-run markets. Most Amtrak experience so far has been to the contrary. In reality, the long-haul trains do well, and the shorter-haul runs are losers.

Long-haul trains offer amenities that buses cannot hope to match, and are worth waiting for, even if they operate tri-weekly. Many of the important cities are linked in one line for the long-haul routes, and long-haul trains can consolidate many different types of business on one line movement, offering reasonable loads at modest overall costs.

It is going to be a long time until each Midwest city is at the center of a "spider web" of viable short-haul passenger train systems. Meanwhile, the great distances in the American West (and the great number of scenic and recreation attractions also) do dictate the need for additional train service that can and will be heavily used within a short time of introduction.

It is my hope that development of both long-haul and short-haul trains proceeds simultaneously in the U.S., but I feel that such will not be the case where geocentricity among the Amtrak boosters rules. The CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR has been the equivalent of a mobile National Park, and as such, should be receiving support from all parts of the U.S., just as a Redwoods National Park in California, or the Everglades National Park in Florida--national values in any respect.

This is my national outlook. I have been making my viewpoints on additional passenger trains for my own particular state and region known in other (and more local) forums. I do not think this is terribly inconsistent. I would make my views on national parks known in a national forum (Congress) and on a state park, in a lesser forum (state legislature). If I had views on a city park, I would lay them on my city hall. If large numbers of Amtrak supporters think in this fashion, I am certain there will be progress on all fronts, with fewer people each year feeling that an advance in one area elsewhere might represent a "defeat" on the home turf.

This type of discussion cannot help but highlight the increasing urgency for development of a National Passenger Train Plan (similar to the Interstate Highway Plan of the 1950s) and public hearings on such a plan in every region of the U.S.

Glenn Lee
Seattle, Washington

I do fully support your efforts to reinstitute the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR. I would go even so far as to say, "What's wrong with the WP route all the way, Niles Canyon, Altamont Pass and all the rest of it to Sacramento?" I would pay a surcharge to take it. I would arrange around a tri-weekly schedule to make it. And I would be right on it as soon as it restarted!

Also someone was trying to organize a new transcontinental route via Dallas, Shreveport, Natchez and Hattiesburg, etc, recently in your magazine. I think that's an outstanding idea. I certainly would love to try it. Anything is better than that #@@&#$ NATIONAL LIMITED!!! In any case, some really good suggestions are coming thru. I hope someone at Amtrak is reading.

Intis Vanags
San Ramon, California

In the Second May issue of RTN it was stated that the CN's run between Winnipeg and Thunder Bay was the longest RDC run in North America. In fact, it is not even the longest RDC run in Canada. According to the July, 1974 edition of British Columbia Railway's passenger train schedules, their tri-weekly North Vancouver-Prince George "Dayliner" RDC's exceed the CN's Thunder Bay operation in both mileage and in duration--462 miles and 14 hours (vs. 438 miles and 11 hours for the CN run).

Tim O. Repp
Redmond, Washington

I'm delighted to see the controversy among RTN's readers regarding Eastern vs. Western CZ-type trains. To my way of thinking it gets down to the whole question of the proper role of trains in the passenger transportation system. Are they to serve as a means of entertainment in themselves and by way of the scenery they pass by or do they serve a valid economic function. Hopefully the answer will be the

Rail Travel News (formerly Rail Travel Newsletter), Vol. 5, No. 12 (Whole No. 110). Second Issue of June, 1975. Copyright © 1975 by Message Media. Published twice monthly by Message Media, P.O. Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Subscription $8.00 per year; single copy 35¢. STAFF: James Russell, Editor; Paul Rayton, Editor-at-Large. Regional Correspondents: Peter Putnam Bretz, Malibu; Jack Ferry, Chicago; Kenneth Maylath, Baltimore; Peter Roehm, Boston. Mailing date this issue: June 30, 1975.

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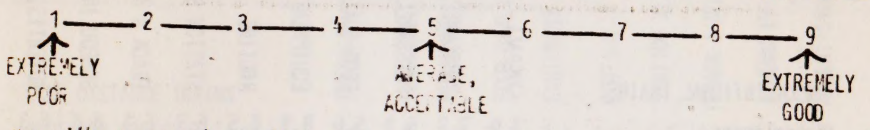

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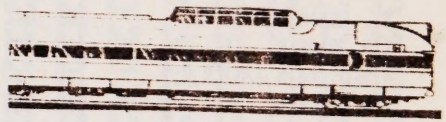

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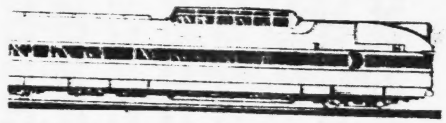

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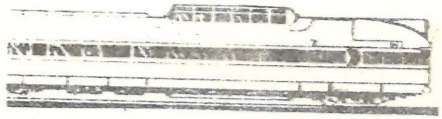

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"Train ran on time into Newark, but only because of the ending of Daylight Savings Time. Dinner menu was very limited. The lounge was not equipped with soft drinks and snacks." (William F. Dennehy, Lexington, KY).

"The 3400-series lounge cars used are a real operating joke. The generators frequently die, causing no heat, lights or air conditioning. The cars themselves don't have enough weight and ride terribly on PC track in comparison to the diner. The 8800-series diners are nice and a pleasure to work in." (Amtrak employee, Chicago).

"Roadbed awful, timekeeping horrendous. You can't depend on it to make Western connections at Chicago. It is very unfortunate that this train is the only link between the populous East and Amtrak fine Western trains. It's a bad way to begin a long trip." (Tom Smith, Wilmington, DE).

"I massacred myself attempting a blade shave on PC roadbed. As I readied myself for a business day, I calculated that we would be at least 3 hours late, a prophecy later proved correct." (John D. Sieber, Pittsburgh, PA).

"The conductor on train 151 tore out of my ticket book not only the ticket to N.Y. but also the ticket from N.Y. to Chicago, and kept it. I did not notice the loss. The BROADWAY conductor really yelled at me when he discovered the loss, even tho it was not my fault and the stub carbon showed that I had had a ticket. He was very ugly about it, but finally let me stay on." (Carbondale, IL reader).

"Train crews good. Excellent waiter in diner. All-night lounge car terrific. Breakfast was tasty." (Eric A. Zeliff, Madison, NJ).

"We took the BROADWAY from Canton, OH to New York City, and it was bad. The personnel were nice, train somewhat clean, but roadbed and schedule very poor. If it hadn't been for the ride on the EMPIRE STATE EXPRESS, I might have thought that (CBS TV's) "Sixty Minutes" was right in its program on Amtrak. The ride on the EMPIRE STATE was really nice." (E. J. Costello, Grosse Pte Farms, MI).

SOUTHERN CRESCENT: "The existence of the train is a secret along its route." (R. van Wormer, Jacksonville, AL).

"Train was immaculate, on time, and all personnel were helpful, courteous and very friendly. This included getting the train thru Inman Yard less than two hours after it had been partially destroyed by tornado, and getting me to a connection with the FLORIDIAN. It is amazing how well a train can be run when it is done right." (David Crossman, Philadelphia, PA).

"Spotlessly clean everywhere, inside, in vestibules, and outside. Passenger packet is excellent on-train promotion." (H. E. Price, Miami, FL).

"A real nice 'folksy' train; enjoyable." (Stuart H. Simonds, Bellingham, WA).

"Graciousness and hospitality abound on the SOUTHERN CRESCENT and the LONE STAR." (R. M. Olson, Bryan, TX).

"There is entirely too much fanfare given this train by the RR, the parochial press, and the traveling public. After all, there really aren't many Eastern trains that rate even acceptable, and perhaps for want of a better train with which to make comparison, this one is given incredibly higher marks than deserved!" (Alexandria, VA reader).

"With the present level of service offered by Amtrak, I would have to rate it the the best-operated passenger train in the U.S.A." (E. M. Ferguson, Jr., Winston-Salem, NC).

NORTHEAST CORRIDOR CONVENTIONAL TRAINS: "I think that Penn Central treated our train pretty well. Somehow our GG-1 shorted out the overhead wires a few hundred feet south of Philadelphia. Within minutes there were 18 men on the ground really hustling out of the station area. There were guys in ties and suitjackets, track workers, electrical men, and of course some of our own crew. We were delayed for a half hour, but those buys seemed prepared and concerned." (Walter Gehring, Dalton, MA).

"The waiter was in a very bad mood. No coffee because cups were missing. My milk was sour and the roll was terrible. The station in Boston was horrible. It was just about as bad as Trenton, and that is about as bad as bad can be." (Paul F. Frantz, Milwaukee, WI).

"The crew had a 'Devil-may-care' attitude." (Alexandria, VA reader).

"I have yet to find an Amtrak trainman who did not do everything possible to assist each individual passenger. They were all friendly, helpful and treated one with the greatest respect. I was amazed by this at first, but it seems to be standard procedure. Ride quality of rebuilt conventional equipment along the PC main line is very good. The selection from the snack bars should be upgraded." (Michael L. Burshtin, Richland, NJ).

MONTREALER: "From long, sad experience with the MONTREALER, which included a round trip in Jan. 1974 without lights in both directions; a frozen diner; two entrees out of five in stock; no sodas or snacks in the Pub; a sleeper with backed up toilets, no lights and no heat; no hot water--the service is slipshod and haphazard. I have ridden this train 6 times to Montreal. Not once has everything gone right." (David Crossman, Philadelphia, PA).

"Dining crews excellent, but lack proper equipment for a suitable diner on this train. Track is good. Piano players paid by Amtrak very good. Le Pub car makes the train what it is." (Keith White, Memphis, TN).

MIDWEST TURBOLINERS: "Seating is rather cramped and inflexible--like an airplane on wheels. Dining and lounge facilities are rather utilitarian and 'processed.' The arrangement lacks creativity and is not inspiring to 'people contact' and intimacy. No first class service is available and reservations are not needed--we almost had nowhere to sit and couldn't be together out of Springfield." (Thomas Beaumont, Minneapolis, MN).

"I rode this train twice weekly last year for 2 months. Since then I have ridden the thing several times when planes were grounded and the service has remained the same or deteriorated. The equipment is very nice--smooth riding, large glass windows, and dependable, but the on-board facilities and personnel leave much to be desired... My blood boils every time I read in your magazine about those railfans who enjoyed the trip. They were not on board Friday or Sunday evenings in either direction without seats, falling baggage from racks, no food, warm beer, cold coffee, nor did they ride with a family, or sit on plastic seats with wet clothes after boarding in a rainstorm. I am interested in good passenger trains, and this service is NOT the way to go." (David Randall, Alton, IL).

ADIRONDACK: "ADIRONDACK on March 17th--the friendliest train of all. Fresh green carnations to all passengers on St. Patrick's Day. Train brochure and stationery. Shamrocks decorated the dome/coffee shop. Drumhead on the rear." (H. E. Price, Miami, FL.).

"Very nice train, a great run, very scenic trip. All D&H personnel helpful, but who runs the train, D&H or Amtrak?" (James J. Lundquist, Spring Valley, CA).

WE WILL PUBLISH more of these comments in the next issue. The fullest publication of these comments, expanded train rating tables, along with much more material including accounts of contemporary train trips, many photos and other information will appear in our forthcoming Yearbook, planned for publication in early August. This will be an approximately 50-page, 8½x11 size paperbound book priced at $3.50 each. Orders may be placed now (Californians please add 6 or 6½% sales tax). No postage charge. Order from Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

UNCONVENTIONAL TRAINS	OVERALL	PERSONNEL, EXC. FOOD	PERSONNEL, DIN. & LOUNGE	FOOD QUALITY	EQUIPMENT	ROUTING	STATION SERVICES	TRACK & ROADBED	SCHEDULING	ADVERTISING & PROMOTION
Metroliners	7.9	7.7	5.7	5.6	8.1	8.5	6.3	6.1	8.8	6.3
Northeast Turbotrains	7.7	7.0	6.6	6.2	7.9	8.1	7.0	5.0	6.7	3.9
Chicago-Detroit Turboliners	6.6	6.0	4.0	3.9	7.9	7.8	5.6	4.3	6.3	7.0
Chic-St. Louis Turboliners	6.3	5.6	5.0	4.1	6.2	7.7	5.9	5.7	6.0	4.6
SHORT DISTANCE & CORRIDOR TRAINS										
MERCHANTS LIMITED	7.9	7.4	7.0	7.1	8.2	8.6	7.0	7.1	7.1	3.2
BLACK HAWK	7.8	8.5	5.5	4.7	7.0	7.8	4.5	6.2	5.7	2.2
PUGET SOUND/MT. RAINIER	7.8	5.2	7.4	5.2	8.2	8.4	3.6	6.6	7.2	6.0
ST. CLAIR/WOLVERINE	7.3	6.2	5.8	5.5	5.9	8.6	7.0	5.6	6.5	5.0
SAN JOAQUIN	7.0	7.1	6.4	6.8	6.4	6.7	6.2	7.2	4.2	3.1
MIXED TRAIN 7/8 (S.R.)	7.0	7.0	4.0	3.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	7.5	8.0	3.0
SAN DIEGANS	6.8	6.3	6.3	5.3	5.6	8.8	6.8	7.3	6.4	3.6
Hiawatha Service	6.8	6.3	6.0	-	6.8	5.8	8.0	8.0	8.0	3.8
Empire Service	6.6	7.4	5.0	4.8	5.9	8.2	4.6	5.9	6.4	3.7
PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL	6.4	6.8	6.2	6.4	6.2	6.6	5.3	6.4	4.2	3.0
BLUE RIDGE	6.0	7.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	7.3	4.2	5.8	7.0	2.8
Northeast Corr. Conventional	5.6	5.7	4.8	4.0	4.4	8.4	6.2	6.6	6.7	2.9
SHAWNEE	5.5	7.0	5.5	5.0	3.5	7.0	-	4.0	3.5	4.5
BLUE WATER	5.3	6.0	3.0	3.0	4.3	7.0	5.0	5.3	3.7	5.0
QUAD CITIES ROCKET (R.I.)	5.0	8.0	7.2	6.4	7.0	7.5	6.0	2.2	5.6	5.3
PEORIA ROCKET (R.I.)	4.8	8.0	8.5	8.2	5.6	7.0	4.5	2.6	6.2	4.7
PIEDMONT (S.R.)	4.5	6.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	9.0	3.5	7.5	4.0	1.0

In the tables above we have listed the trains in order of their overall ratings, from highest to lowest. This is obviously only one of many possible ways of looking at these figures. To tabulate the data, we had access to a Hewlett-Packard programmable electronic calculator. As we slowly made our way thru the figures, our suspense grew, wondering what American train would take the honors of highest ratings.

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LONG DISTANCE TRAINS	OVERALL	PERSONNEL, EXC. FOOD	PERSONNEL, DIN. & LOUNGE	FOOD QUALITY	EQUIPMENT	ROUTING	STATION SERVICES	TRACK & ROADBED	SCHEDULING	ADVERTISING & PROMOTION
SOUTHERN CRESCENT (S.R.)	7.8	7.8	7.8	8.1	7.3	7.9	6.5	6.1	7.3	5.3
SOUTHWEST LIMITED	7.7	7.0	7.6	7.6	7.8	7.8	6.7	7.3	7.6	4.0
SILVER METEOR	7.3	6.7	6.1	7.7	7.3	7.6	6.7	6.8	7.7	5.0
RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR (D&RGW)	7.3	7.0	8.2	8.5	8.2	8.9	5.5	6.9	5.9	2.7
SILVER STAR	7.2	6.5	5.7	7.4	6.4	7.1	7.0	7.3	6.5	5.1
ADIRONDACK	7.2	8.2	7.4	6.9	6.8	8.2	6.3	6.0	6.8	4.8
LONE STAR	7.1	6.9	6.7	7.6	7.4	6.2	7.1	6.8	6.3	3.1
COAST STARLIGHT	7.1	6.3	6.2	6.8	5.7	7.8	6.2	6.9	6.6	4.9
EMPIRE STATE EXPRESS	6.8	7.1	6.1	6.2	6.2	7.8	4.9	5.8	6.9	3.0
MONTREALER	6.8	5.9	5.6	6.7	5.9	7.2	6.8	5.2	7.2	4.6
EMPIRE BUILDER	6.8	6.4	6.6	6.9	7.2	6.6	5.9	7.0	6.2	3.8
NIGHT OWL	6.7	8.0	4.3	3.7	3.7	8.7	7.3	4.7	8.0	6.7
CHAMPION	6.6	6.2	6.1	7.0	5.9	7.9	7.1	6.5	6.8	3.0
SUNSET LIMITED	6.6	6.9	7.3	7.5	6.8	8.0	4.8	5.7	5.0	3.1
NORTH COAST HIAWATHA	6.6	6.4	6.4	6.5	7.4	7.7	6.8	7.5	6.4	4.2
SOUTHERN CRESCENT (Amtrak)	6.6	6.1	6.2	5.7	5.1	8.0	5.9	5.4	7.3	5.8
MONTAINEER	6.4	6.7	5.2	6.0	5.4	6.1	5.8	7.7	6.7	4.5
SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR	6.3	6.6	6.5	7.0	6.3	5.8	5.7	6.6	5.6	3.9
JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY	6.0	6.7	5.5	6.0	6.2	7.2	5.5	6.0	6.2	3.8
BROADWAY LIMITED	5.8	6.2	6.6	7.1	6.2	6.4	5.1	3.5	5.7	3.6
INTER-AMERICAN	5.1	6.4	7.2	8.0	4.4	5.0	5.2	7.2	3.6	2.5
FLORIDIAN	4.9	5.7	5.2	6.6	5.2	4.4	4.2	5.1	4.9	3.9
PANAMA LIMITED	4.8	4.9	5.0	5.9	4.0	8.1	5.8	3.9	5.4	2.4
NATIONAL LIMITED	4.0	4.8	5.7	6.4	4.2	6.6	3.6	3.5	3.2	2.4

Among the unconventional trains there is interesting food for thought. The Metroliners clearly rate most highly, with scheduling, routing and equipment especially standing out, tho they are rated rather low on food and food personnel. The United Aircraft Turbotrains are rated surprisingly high, surpassing or nearly matching the Metroliners in many categories. Our raters clearly liked them better than the new French-designed Turboliners--this in spite of the various problems that have beset them. The Turboliners received rather mediocre overall ratings, and herein lies a dilemma: riders seem to prefer the Turbo whose manufacture has been discontinued, while they appear lukewarm about the recently-introduced European design on which Amtrak is pinning its hopes for upgrading corridor service in a number of locations. What does this mean? We will go into this in more detail further on.

If we check out the bottom of the lists now, we find that America's lowest-rated train, at least in this survey, is the NATIONAL LIMITED. Its average overall rating was only 4, or Below Average, in the Unacceptable category. (Note also an irony here: Amtrak's lowest-rated long distance train joins up with and exchanges cars with its highest-rated, the SOUTHWEST LIMITED.)

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Chic-St. Louis Turboliners	6.3	5.6	5.0	4.1	6.2	7.7	5.9	5.7	6.0	4.6
SHORT DISTANCE & CORRIDOR TRAINS										
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BLACK HAWK	7.8	8.5	5.5	4.7	7.0	7.8	4.5	6.2	5.7	2.2
PUGET SOUND/MT. RAINIER	7.8	5.2	7.4	5.2	8.2	8.4	3.6	6.6	7.2	6.0
ST. CLAIR/WOLVERINE	7.3	6.2	5.8	5.5	5.9	8.6	7.0	5.6	6.5	5.0
SAN JOAQUIN	7.0	7.1	6.4	6.8	6.4	6.7	6.2	7.2	4.2	3.1
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PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL	6.4	6.8	6.2	6.4	6.2	6.6	5.3	6.4	4.2	3.0
BLUE RIDGE	6.0	7.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	7.3	4.2	5.8	7.0	2.8
Northeast Corr. Conventional	5.6	5.7	4.8	4.0	4.4	8.4	6.2	6.6	6.7	2.9
SHAWNEE	5.5	7.0	5.5	5.0	3.5	7.0	-	4.0	3.5	4.5
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QUAD CITIES ROCKET (R.I.)	5.0	8.0	7.2	6.4	7.0	7.5	6.0	2.2	5.6	5.3
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RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR (D&RGW)	7.3	7.0	8.2	8.5	8.2	8.9	5.5	6.9	5.9	2.7
SILVER STAR	7.2	6.5	5.7	7.4	6.4	7.1	7.0	7.3	6.5	5.1
ADIRONDACK	7.2	8.2	7.4	6.9	6.8	8.2	6.3	6.0	6.8	4.8
LONE STAR	7.1	6.9	6.7	7.6	7.4	6.2	7.1	6.8	6.3	3.1
COAST STARLIGHT	7.1	6.3	6.2	6.8	5.7	7.8	6.2	6.9	6.6	4.9
EMPIRE STATE EXPRESS	6.8	7.1	6.1	6.2	6.2	7.8	4.9	5.8	6.9	3.0
MONTREALER	6.8	5.9	5.6	6.7	5.9	7.2	6.8	5.2	7.2	4.6
EMPIRE BUILDER	6.8	6.4	6.6	6.9	7.2	6.6	5.9	7.0	6.2	3.8
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SUNSET LIMITED	6.6	6.9	7.3	7.5	6.8	8.0	4.8	5.7	5.0	3.1
NORTH COAST HIAWATHA	6.6	6.4	6.4	6.5	7.4	7.7	6.8	7.5	6.4	4.2
SOUTHERN CRESCENT (Amtrak)	6.6	6.1	6.2	5.7	5.1	8.0	5.9	5.4	7.3	5.8
MOUNTAINEER	6.4	6.7	5.2	6.0	5.4	6.1	5.8	7.7	6.7	4.5
SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR	6.3	6.6	6.5	7.0	6.3	5.8	5.7	6.6	5.6	3.9
JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY	6.0	6.7	5.5	6.0	6.2	7.2	5.5	6.0	6.2	3.8
BROADWAY LIMITED	5.8	6.2	6.6	7.1	6.2	6.4	5.1	3.5	5.7	3.6
INTER-AMERICAN	5.1	6.4	7.2	8.0	4.4	5.0	5.2	7.2	3.6	2.5
FLORIDIAN	4.9	5.7	5.2	6.6	5.2	4.4	4.2	5.1	4.9	3.9
PANAMA LIMITED	4.8	4.9	5.0	5.9	4.0	8.1	5.8	3.9	5.4	2.4
NATIONAL LIMITED	4.0	4.8	5.7	6.4	4.2	6.6	3.6	3.5	3.2	2.4

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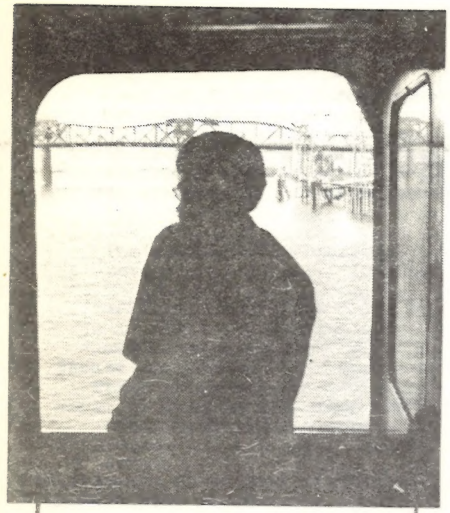
The PANAMA LIMITED and the FLORIDIAN also received below-average overall ratings, and the INTER-AMERICAN barely squeaked into a slightly above average position. The BROADWAY LIMITED received quite mediocre ratings for one of Amtrak's Premier trains (incidentally, people sent us more ratings on the BROADWAY than on any other train, so its ratings are based on a lot of observations). Comparing categories, it's easy to see that one outstandingly bad factor--poor track--is the principal component that mars people's opinion of this train. Once track upgrading programs are completed, one would expect that the BROADWAY would rate higher on the list. As of now, the only lower track ratings are given to the Rock Island's two passenger runs.

Looking at Amtrak's other Premier trains, it seems peculiar (unless one has followed the fates of Amtrak right along) that they are not all among the most highly rated trains. Note, for example, that the COAST STARLIGHT is tied for fifth place among Amtrak long-distancers, and for seventh place in the nation. And the BROADWAY is shockingly low. What this suggests is that Amtrak has not been in control of its medium. When it wants to raise the status of a particular train, it is not entirely able to do so. Either some things have been beyond its control (such as track condition), or it simply does not have the know-how to achieve its aims--or both.

On short-distance runs, Amtrak seems more successful in establishing a more uniform level of service. Privately-operated short distance trains fall at the bottom of the heap (in large part due to track condition), while privately-operated long distance trains--the SOUTHERN CRESCENT and the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR--achieve ratings that Amtrak would envy. This situation may reflect the continuing emphasis upon the importance of the short-haul train (or more correctly, the unimportance of the long distance train) in the thinking of Washington planners.

In the short-haul category, the ratings for the ST. CLAIR and WOLVERINE were made before the recent introduction of Turboliner service on the Chicago-Detroit route. Comparing these conventional trains with the Turboliners, one finds that the new French trains make a poor showing in our survey. The components that contribute most to the lower ratings are the food and food service and the track. The new Turbo equipment gets higher ratings, but apparently it doesn't ride as well on the existing track as the conventional cars did, thus the lower track ratings. One sees a similar situation in comparing the track for the Northeast Turbotrains with that for Northeast conventional trains: the track gets a considerably lower rating when it's being evaluated from inside a fast, lightweight train than from a slower, jolt-dampening conventional train. There isn't much track in the U.S. that's presently well-suited for the proper operation of modern, ultra-lightweight equipment. (Parenthetically, it is now an open secret that Amtrak intends to move the United Aircraft Turbos to the Los Angeles-San Diego route, where the track should give them a better ride.)

Besides comparing types of trains, one can look at rating categories, e.g., food quality, and check which trains rate best. In the matter of dining, the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR was rated highest, with an 8.2 rating for dining car personnel and an 8.5 for food quality. The PEORIA ROCKET was very nearly the same, with 8.5 and 8.2 respectively, while the SOUTHERN CRESCENT was also very high, with 7.8 and 8.1. No Amtrak train rated as high in food as these three privately-operated trains, even though Amtrak's food quality has been widely praised as one of its strong points. The train rated lowest in these categories was the BLUE WATER, with 3.0 on both--well below the level of average accepability. One is alarmed at the low ratings on food service on the Detroit Turboliners, and can assume that the recent switch from conventional food service to the often-criticized Turboliner-type service has created a strong negative reaction among passengers (the pre-Turbo food service wasn't rated highly either--5.8 for personnel, 5.5 for food quality).



FALL FROM GREATNESS? The first train that Amtrak "created," and the first to be given "premier" status is ranked only 7th among American long distance trains. Its lowest ratings came on equipment and promotion. Many raters said that the train needs a dome car and a second diner, especially at peak seasons. Here, a porter on the COAST STARLIGHT waits at the vestibule as the train crosses the Willamette River into Portland. Photo: Message Med.

It's possible to go on at great length analyzing these ratings in this fashion. But now let's let the raters speak for themselves. The riders' priceless comments tell a vast amount that can't be learned from the numbers alone. Here is a more-or-less random selection of comments, grouped by train name.

METROLINERS: "This service does what it is designed to do: get people from downtown New York to Philadelphia or Washington quickly, in comfort, and with streetcar frequency during the business day. A resort on wheels it ain't, but it remains the one train in America that a businessman can take and not feel that his comptroller will class him as a rail nut when he puts the tickets on his expense account. Quck, inexpensive, good food, but I still like to sit down in a diner when I eat." (Eugene Blabey, Camillus, NY).

"This is the only stateside train trip where I was treated as a first class passenger. Lexan windows have to go. They spoil viewing and photography. I also would like to see Metroliners cars with better visibility of track fore and aft for passenger viewing." (Ken Peale, APO San Francisco).

"When on fast track ran 105-110mph wherever possible. Comfortable ride. Arrived in New York less than 5mins late. Excellent train." (R. L. Skinner, Jr., Troy MI).

"Amtrak does a pretty consistently good job with these trains. They are well-liked and heavily patronized by my non-railfan friends. Many of the cars are now overdue for refurbishing and Penn Central's roadbed is deteriorating." (Maryland reader).

NORTHEAST TURBOTRAINS: "Turbotrains not well adapted to this route. The ride is bumpy and often uncomfortable. I imagine it would be better on different track. In addition, seating in the dome is too cramped. Menu is too limited, and there are often not enough steak dinners to meet the demand. Microwave oven results vary considerably; steak is sometimes cooked correctly, sometimes too cold. Vegetables and potatoes are never cooked correctly." (Stephen Linde, Waltham, MA).

"the only train in the U.S. where one can sit up with the engineer. It will be too bad when they go if they're not replaced in kind, especially for kids." (Jonathan Leiby, Falmouth, MA).

"the passengers (non-railfan) really like them. The general public gets a big charge out of riding in the dome (a rarity in the East) and watching the engineer. In spite of their breakdowns, they have brought much goodwill to Amtrak." (Maryland reader).

BROADWAY LIMITED: "Lounge car terrific." (Milwaukee reader).

"it desperately needs to run in two sections with better dining service. The road bed is atrocious. The cars are terrible, always in bad order, and the stations abominable." (George M. Jenks, Lewisburg, PA).

"The 64-seat twin unit dining car was completely inadequate to serve the large

(continued on page 12)

THE SUPER CONTINENTAL AND THE CANADIAN: A SPRING 1975 COMPARISON

By Duane W. Roller

A late-May/early-June transcontinental trip allowed me a chance to compare the present state of the Canadian and the Super Continental. I rode the Canadian from Toronto to Vancouver, and returned via the Super Continental, with a business stopover in Edmondton. My trip led me to the unexpected but unmistakable conclusion that as of now, the Canadian is far superior to the Super Continental.

Let me make a comparison of the two runs, based roughly on RTN's 10-point train ratings scheme:

Service from on board personnel: On both trains excellent, although there were some signs of deterioration of morale on CN. Nevertheless, by and large, the problems that arose on CN (such as air conditioning failures) were handled without the grumpiness that often besets Amtrak crews. CP's crew was superb in every respect: I had the feeling all members were working hard to prove the value and importance of the train as an argument against discontinuance.

Dining car service: Again excellent on both train, especially in terms of efficiency. Amtrak stewards, who seem so often unable to handle crowds, could learn a lot here. No complaints.

Dining car food: Amtrak prices have spoiled us all. On CP, full dinners began at $4.30, on CN at $4.55. But the diners always seemed to be well-patronized. Food was good if not excellent. The CN menu, however--used for both lunch and dinner--is terribly monotonous now that the length of the trip has been extended. There are two variant menus, but the differences are slight. Greater variety both on individual menus and between lunch and dinner, is essential on CN. The CP diner looked nicer than CN's, with its fresh colors, heavy silver plate flatware, and three kinds of sugar (granulated, cube, and brown) at breakfast.

Type of cars: The Canadian is holding up nicely, and there were no indications of malfunctions. The dome and lounge space was adequate for the number of passengers. On the other hand, the CN equipment is deteriorating badly. Dome lounge "Jasper" had its air conditioning begin to fail: dome lounge "Columbia" had already failed; heavyweight lounge "Gaiete" was rough riding and very uncomfortable. The lounge space was not adequate for the number of passengers, and the interior layout of the dome cars wastes much space and only allows 14 window seats.

Track and roadbed: CP's is superb. CN's is getting quite bad, especially in the mountains, and in western Ontario. The train handling of CP was also superb (only one rough stop during the entire trip): CN's was atrocious, with passengers thrown to the floor more than once.

Present scheduling: On CP we ran on time to Thunder Bay, and then lost two hours due to freight congestion and one case of poor dispatching, into Winnipeg. After Winnipeg we steadily made up time and arrived Vancouver 9 minutes late. There are some parts, especially west of Calgary, that are greatly padded, and if less priority were given to freight trains, probably as much as four hours total could be removed. But compared to CN's current schedule it is wonderful. CN's timings--allegedly the 1927 schedule--would make the Floridian seem like a Metroliner. Yet in spite of the ludicrous schedule, we lost and made up a total of five hours enroute. Freight train priority is the rule, and we often spent up to an hour in a sidetrack with no loss of schedule. The relation of schedule to running times is non-existent. Some examples: The 75 miles from Valemount to Jasper took 3 hours 15 minutes. The schedule calls for 6:10 Jasper-Edmondton: we made it in 5:07. St. Lazare-Rivers is scheduled in 1:25; we did it in 1:07 (thus a 12-minute wait for time at Rivers), but Brandon North-Portage is scheduled at 1:25 and it took us 1:48 with no noticable delays. We arrived Toronto on the minute, after having been over two hours late the previous evening. Clearly the four-night timing is unnecessary, and the published reason--to allow nighttime passage of the Fraser River canyon--could still be fulfilled with late evening arrival Toronto rather than following morning.

One is led to conclude that CN has embarked on the time-honored tradition of annoying passengers just enough to drive them away without being so bad as to cause a scandal or government investigation. I must admit I was appalled, having had nothing but excellent service from CN in eastern Canada.

One service that both trains provided that is a necessity for Amtrak is the presence of a sleeping car conductor. A trained person (not a public relations employee) should be available to handle problems. Operating crew change too frequently for them to be familiar with problems except in their own division.

Both trains were well patronized, but it is clear that CP was holding down consists below what business would stand. The train is often sold out 4 to 6 weeks in advance even in the off-season. Consists are noted below.

I would recommend the Canadian to anyone wanting a superb train trip. The Super Continental, on the other hand, I cannot recommend any more. Bad equipment, rough track, the slow schedule, and the loss of the many improvements placed in service by CN so recently (no hospitality hour, bingo only two of the four nights), have nearly ruined this train for me.

CP 11 5/28/75 (Toronto)
mail storage--Sudbury
baggage/dorm--Vancouver
coach--
coach--
coach--Sudbury
skyline dome--
"Bell Manor"--Vancouver
"Chateau Argenson"--
diner--

CP 1 5/28/75 (arriving Sudbury)
baggage/dorm--Montreal/Sudbury
coach--
skyline dome--Montral/Vancouver
diner--Montreal/Sudbury
"Wolfe Manor"--Montreal/Vancouver
"Kokanee Park" (obs.)

CP 1 5/28/75 west of Sudbury
baggage/dorm--Toronto/Vancouver
Coach--
coach--
Skyline dome--Montreal/Vancouver
"Bell Manor"--Toronto/Vancouver
"Chateau Argenson"--
diner--
"Wolfe Manor"--Montreal/Vancouver
"Kokanee Park"--

CN 9 observed at Jasper 6/1/75
baggage/mail--Prince Rupert
coach--
coach--
diner-lounge--
"Green Harbour" (6-6-4)--P.George
mail storage--
mail storage--

CN 91 at Winnipeg 6/6/75
container mail--Thompson
baggage--
coach--
snack bar coach--
express--Dauphin

CN 190 at Winnipeg 6/6/75
baggage--Farlane
6 coach--

CN 287 at Winnipeg 6/6/75
express--Sioux Lookout
combination--
coach--
mail storage--
steam generator--

CN 88 Toronto 6/8/75
baggage/mail--Kapuskasing
"Green Gables" (10-6)--
coach--
diner-lounge--Cochrane
coach--Timmins
"Riverfield"(10-6)--
"Kakabeka Falls" (14-4)--Noranda

CN 2 6/5/75 from Edmondton
baggage--Vancouver/Toronto
baggage--Vancouver/Montreal
coach--
coach--Vancouver/Toronto
coach
cafe-lounge--Vancouver/Montreal
daynighter--
daynighter--Vancouver/Toronto
"Entwhistle" (4-8-4)--Vancouver/Mont.
"Evanston" (4-8-4)--
"Leep River" (10-6)--
dome--Vancouver/Winnipeg (replaced by full lounge at Winnipeg for Toronto)
diner--Vancouver-Toronto
"Elnora" (4-8-4)--
"Entrance" (4-8-4)--
"Riviere St. Francois" (10-6)--
"Innes" (24 DplxRmt--dorm)--
mail storage--Edmondton/Winnipeg
mail storage--Hornepayne/Toronto
business--
(No. 2 Vancouver-Edmondton 6/1/75 had similar equipment)

CN 675 enroute 6/7/75
mail storage--Capreol/Nakina
baggage--
coach--
coach--

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Rail Canada

IN CONTINUATION OF the letter from CN's Passenger Marketing VP Garth Campbell, begun last issue: "So far as rail passenger service is concerned, I have long maintained that it has been, and unfortunately continues to be, the most neglected medium for the transportation of people on this continent. The reasons are not hard to find, but to argue in favour of rail service where it does not belong, tends only to discredit the arguments favouring rail where it clearly has both economic and service advantages.

"In my opinion, the real place for rail passenger service is in the high volume, short to medium distance markets: possibly also in selected longer haul main line operations where rail service can offer an attractive alternative both to airlines and buses, on the basis of price and comfort respectively. The neglect of rail potential in those places where it has a real role to play can be ascribed equally to our total preoccupation with highways and airlines since World War II, plus the financial rules applying to the provision of rail services. These have effectively destroyed any real incentive to develop or improve passenger train services in Canada. What has been done has been in spite of, rather than because of attitudes prevailing at virtually every level of government in both Canada and the U.S.

"I also have one other strongly held view which may be of interest to you. That is regarding the need for a sensible integration of rail and highway services, so as to provide in many areas the best passenger transport at the least public cost. For example, in parts of Western Ontario where the great bulk of all travel flows to and from Metro Toronto, a combination of fast, frequent intercity trains might be combined with feeder bus operations serving remote communities not situated on our main lines. This suggestion of course crosses traditional jurisdictional boundaries between the Federal and Provincial Governments and represents new thinking on both parts.

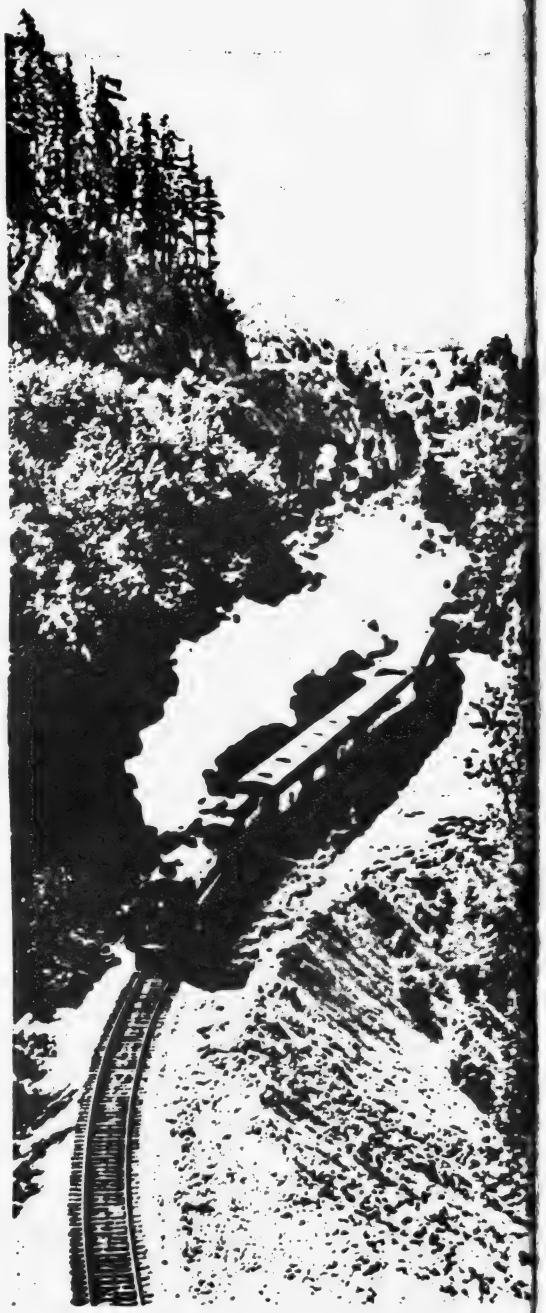

Photo: B. C. Railway

"Recommendations for improvement of rail passenger service wherever they can be economically effective in relation to competitive modes, have been advanced to our Federal Government as part of a joint CN/CP presentation. This involves more favourable financial treatment for Railway passenger services, acquisition of new passenger rolling stock and a vast improvement in many of our main line intercity services. The Railways are willing and able to provide such improved services and await only the acceptance of their proposals by the Ministry of Transport."

CANADIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT may find it cheaper to give free bus tickets to railway passengers than to continue with the program of subsidizing passenger trains, according to Transport Minister Jean Marchand. The Minister, in a policy paper released to the Commons, said that the annual $135 million in rail subsidies will grow to $300 million in 1980 unless changes are made. Marchand said that government losses on passenger trains were 7¢ per passenger mile, compared with 2¢ per passenger mile for air passengers. Road construction subsidies amounted to 6/10 of 1% for motorists. Marchand's 35-minute statement to the Commons was supported by 189 pages of report material.

The new policy, if implemented, would mean the elimination of many or most Canadian passenger trains. The Toronto Star reported that survival was likely only for Windsor, Ont. (Detroit) - Toronto-Montreal-Quebec City "corridor" trains.

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TRANSPORT MINISTER MARCHAND'S Transportation Policy Paper unveiled in the Commons in mid-June indicated that reception of the outlined proposals would be mixed. The report said: "Public opinion, built up by misunderstanding and press comment, might oppose such a policy." And sure enough, a few days later, the influential Toronto Globe & Mail attacked the proposals.

While Marchand's proposals hit passenger service outside the corridors as "wasteful, costly and since in most cases alternative modes exist, unnecessary in that sense," the Globe retorted: "Coming from a Minister who has consistently preached a revival of rail passenger service, to save us all from being 'poisoned by cars,' those declarations of principle sound like part ... of a policy under which railroads would be restored as the basic means of passenger transport in Canada." The Globe said that despite the announced good intentions, the policy falls back on the old cliches of "commercial visibility," so prominent in the 1960s, that caused much of the mess to begin with. The Globe charged that his statements should not be accepted, "with the faith appropriate to the statistical arguments of a Minister of Transport who has admitted on national television that he does not understand freight rates. Mr. Marchand appears unable to look beyond the profit-and-loss figures of the night train to Indian Head, when he should be looking at Canada whole."

Support for the anti-passenger train policy has been heard on the CBC broadcasting commentaries, with some radio figures calling upon the NDP party to support the move to eliminate passenger trains as merely subsidies for the traveling rich. A Toronto Star writer opined that buses could be made more appealing to large classes of the traveling public.

Rail Canada

IN CONTINUATION OF the letter from CN's Passenger Marketing VP Garth Campbell, begun last issue: "So far as rail passenger service is concerned, I have long maintained that it has been, and unfortunately continues to be, the most neglected medium for the transportation of people on this continent. The reasons are not hard to find, but to argue in favour of rail service where it does not belong, tends only to discredit the arguments favouring rail where it clearly has both economic and service advantages.

"In my opinion, the real place for rail passenger service is in the high volume, short to medium distance markets: possibly also in selected longer haul main line operations where rail service can offer an attractive alternative both to airlines and buses, on the basis of price and comfort respectively. The neglect of rail potential in those places where it has a real role to play may be ascribed equally to our total preoccupation with highways and airlines since World War II, plus the financial rules applying to the provision of rail services. These have effectively destroyed any real incentive to develop or improve passenger train services in Canada. What has been done has been in spite of, rather than because of attitudes prevailing at virtually every level of government in both Canada and the U.S.

"I also have one other strongly held view which may be of interest to you. That is regarding the need for a sensible integration of rail and highway services, so as to provide in many areas the best passenger transport at the least public cost. For example, in parts of Western Ontario where the great bulk of all travel flows to and

Photo: B. C. Railway

from Metro Toronto, a combination of fast, frequent intercity trains might be combined with feeder bus operations serving remote communities not situated on our main lines. This suggestion of course crosses traditional jurisdictional boundaries between the Federal and Provincial Governments and represents new thinking on both parts.

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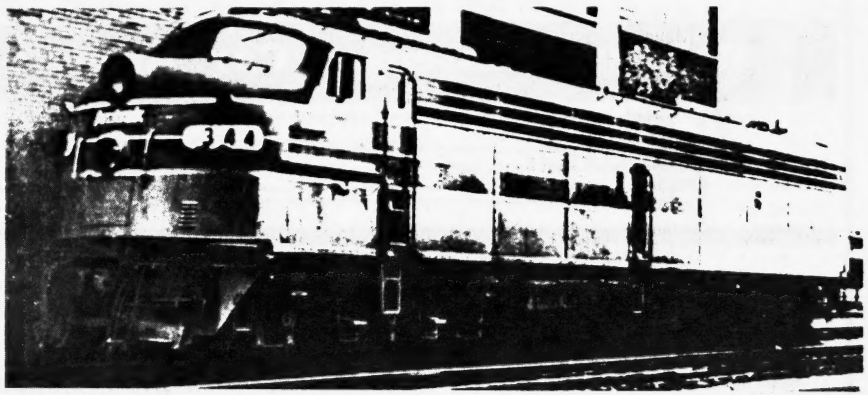

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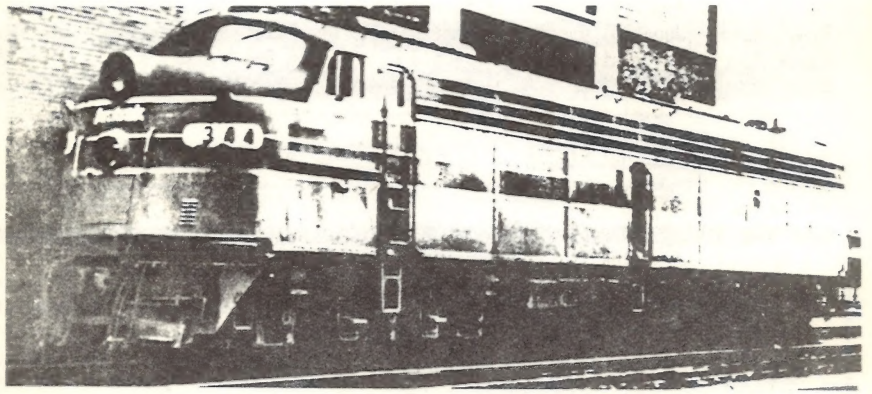

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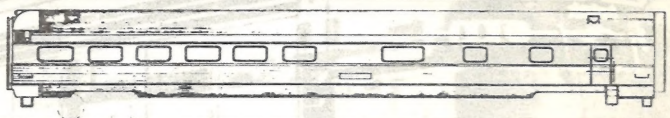
Railway Passenger Car Annual



Volume II 1975

LISTS PASSENGER CARS IN SERVICE ON U.S. AND CANADIAN RAILROADS DURING 1974.

1. Updated Amtrak Roster includes cars renumbered and acquired during 1974.
2. All passenger cars owned by U.S. and Canadian Railroads including:
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$14-million from the taxpayers for Long Beach? Los Angeles Union Station cost less, and the private railroads paid for that marvel. No, I had nothing to do with this funds application by the City Council, routinely approved by the regional council of governments, for what to replace two blocks of downtown Long Beach? A combination bus-and-personal rapid transit station/senior citizens center. There are other plans for other blocks, and I had nothing to do with them, either. --R. J. Swan, public transit catalyst, Box 1866, Long Beach CA 90801.

Holy writ: our Amtrak Law. I am in San Clemente day Law is signed but almost wasn't. I monitor, compile, cut, paste, cross out. I monitor printing booboo for 7 months; now a second paragraph 305(f) is renumbered 305(h). And in 12 nonstop hours, now I type up this clean edition, world's most up-to-date copies of the complete text of our Amtrak Law, unofficial but handy for officials and enthusiasts alike. 25 looseleaf pages are handy for your own inserts, future changes, your use for Amtrak. You pay $6 to the public transit catalyst, Robert J. Swan, Box 1866, Long Beach CA 90801.

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